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ABSTRACT

This booklet discusses the role that parents can play in helping their children mature, make decisions, and adjust to the challenges of the world around them. It suggests that parents and others who take care of children keep in mind the following ideas when interacting with children: (1) focus on "do's" instead of "don'ts"; (2) build feelings of confidence; (3) try to change behavior by changing surroundings or situations; (4) provide choices for children; (5) work with children, not against them; (6) set limits for children; (7) listen to yourself and your child; (8) set a good example; and (9) show love to your children. A parent self-test is provided to review the material covered in the booklet. (MDM)

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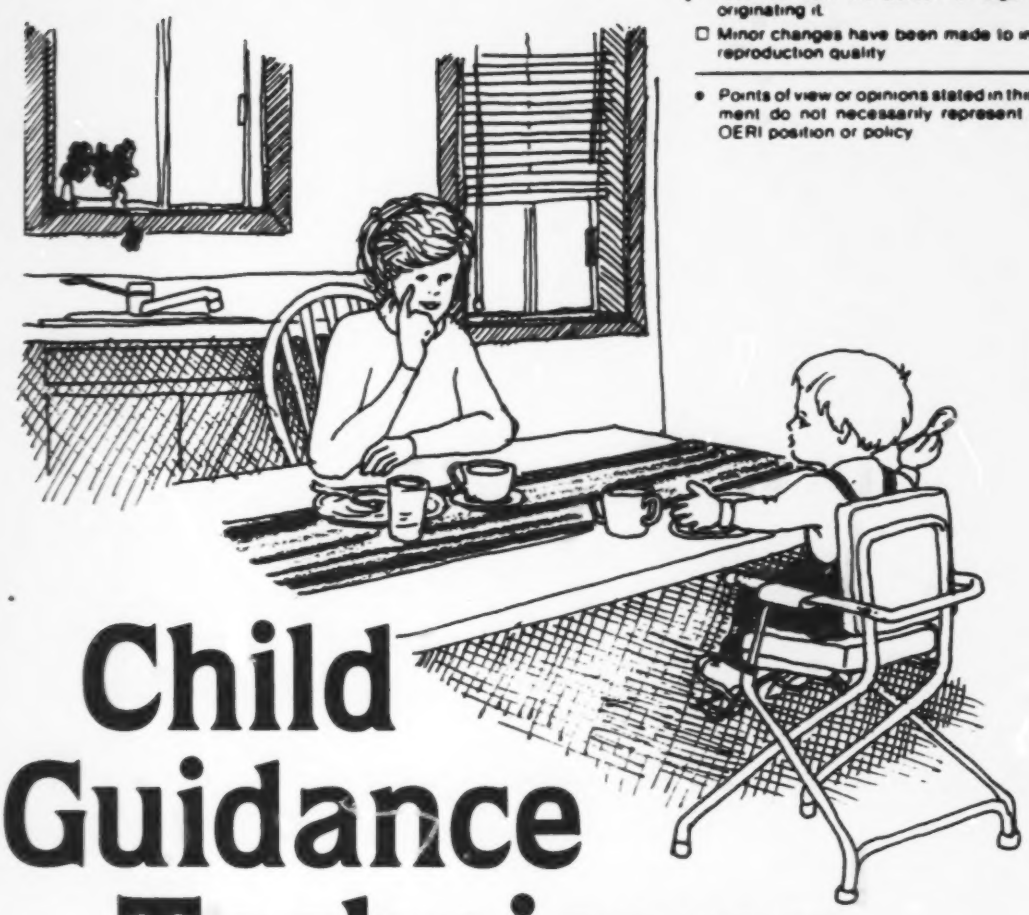

Child Guidance Techniques

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Child Guidance Techniques

Everyone who takes care of children faces daily challenges of trying to teach better ways of behaving. Some have little trouble; others find themselves struggling to decide the best way to help children.

Ways to help children learn suitable behavior have been discovered by specialists who work with children. This publication will help you practice these methods and make it easier for children to learn to act the way you want them to.

When children learn what is expected of them, it is easier for the whole family. Children want to do the right thing, so it is up to parents to guide them. Children who know what is expected of them are happy and learn better in school. Parents are a child's first teacher. Parents offer children guidance by "showing them the way."

Helpful Guidance Methods

Focus on Do's Instead of Don'ts

If you listen to parents guiding children, you often hear words like "don't," "stop," and "quit that." Children need and want to be told what is right and what is wrong by an older, wiser person. Telling them what not to do doesn't help them learn what they should do. When they know how and why to do things, they feel secure. Changing the "don'ts" into "do's" will show children how you expect them to act.

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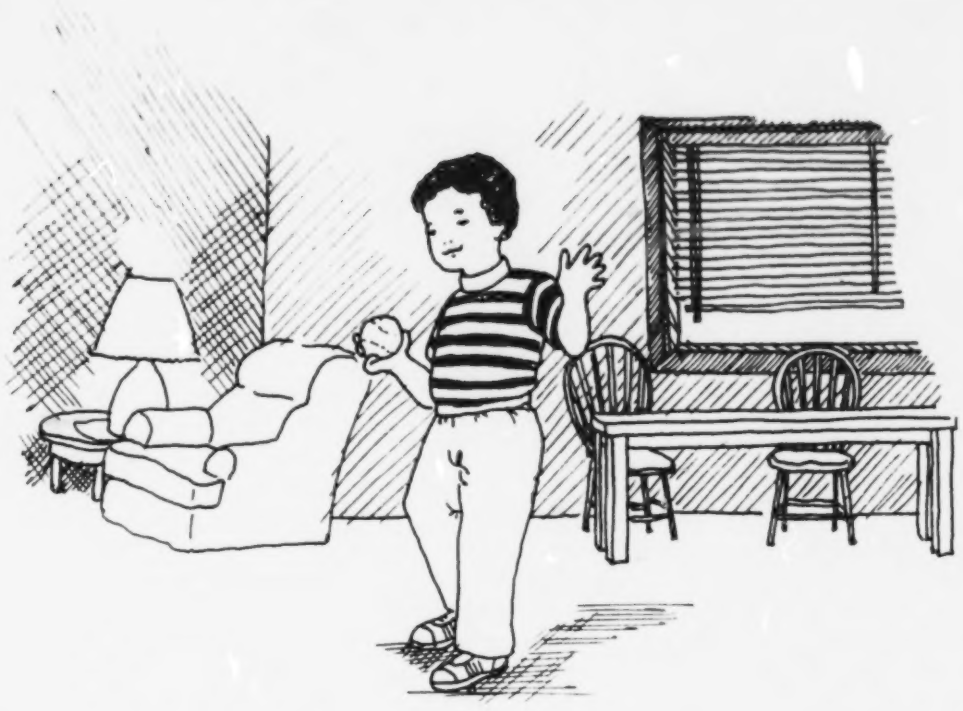
Don'ts	Do's
Don't throw the ball.	Roll the ball on the floor.
Don't squeeze the kitten.	Hold the kitty like this.
Quit hitting your brother.	Hitting hurts.
Don't touch.	We just look at these things.

Build Feelings of Confidence

Children need to develop a belief in their ability to do things and that they are worthwhile. A "can do" feeling encourages them to try new things and go to school feeling sure of themselves. Sometimes parents make children feel worthless by drawing attention to the fact they are too small to do certain things, their forgetfulness, or their lack of skill or know-how. Self-confidence is destroyed in a child that is always "put down." Self-confidence increases in a child that is encouraged. For example:

Situation	Put down	Encouraging
Johnny spills the garbage he is emptying.	"Can't you do anything right?"	"That's a hard job. Next time carry it this way so it won't spill."
Carmen cries because she can't get a box open.	"If you'd listen to me you'd know how to do that."	"You need to do this first. Then the box will open."
James cries because he can't get a wheel on his trike.	"I told you you couldn't do that."	"Let's see why it won't work."



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Change Surroundings to Change Behavior

Misbehavior may be caused by lack of understanding or by situations that are easily changed. If Carmen spills milk at every meal, change the situation by giving her a different glass. A wide, heavy-bottomed glass will prevent tipping. John always pulled mother's belongings out of the sewing machine drawers. Mother changed the situation by giving him his "own" drawer in the sewing machine cabinet. He likes his space and uses his drawer for play.

If John and Carmen kick one another at the table, solve the problem with a new seating plan. Put John at one end of the table, Carmen at the other so their feet cannot reach one another.

When children start fighting in the back seat of the car, change the situation. Give them things to play with like an art pad and color crayons or if possible, have one child sit in front and the other in the back seat. When children are misbehaving, ask yourself: "How could I change the situation to prevent this behavior?"

Provide Choices for Children

An important part of growing up is learning to make choices. Sometimes parents create problems by giving a choice but are not willing to accept a child's answer. If you are not going to let John outside without a coat, you are in trouble if you say: "Do you want to wear your coat?" Chances are that John will say "no." Then you will demand that he wear his coat and an argument is likely to follow. If you want to give a choice that you can accept, say: "Do you want to wear your red coat or your ski jacket?" Either answer is acceptable and you will both be satisfied.

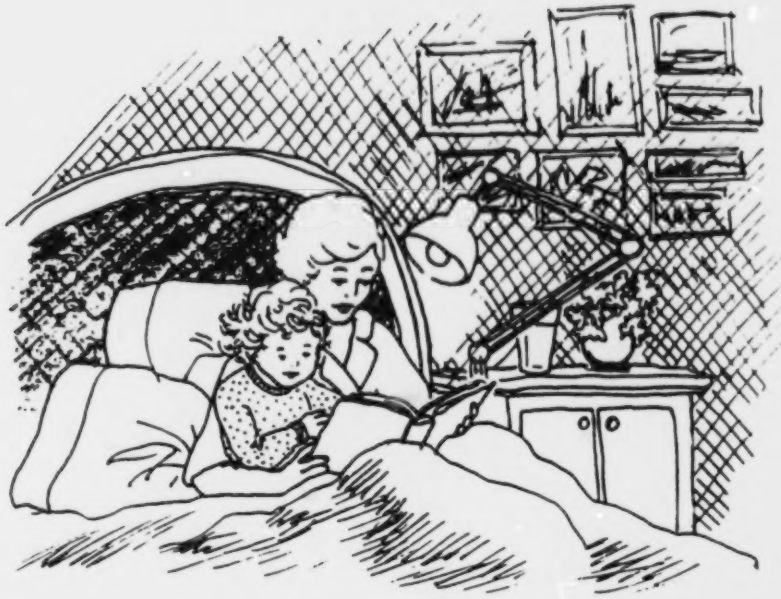
If there is no choice, you can simply say: "You need to wear your coat before you go outside." "It's time for dinner" works better than "Do you want to come in for dinner?" "Mary, you need to go to the bathroom" gets better results than "Do you have to go to the bathroom?"

Children need to learn to make decisions. It is important to give desirable choices whenever possible and to accept their choices.

Work With Children Not Against Them

Young children learn through all of their five senses. They need to touch, taste, and smell as well as see and hear. Babies spend time in their early months looking at things about the house. As soon as they are able to move about, it is natural for them to want to handle and look at these things more closely. The old idea of working with the grain of wood or fabric applies to children as well. Working with the needs of children means giving them freedom to use their senses to find out what things are like.

Many parents think that a child's need to mouth and handle things is troublesome. You help children grow by working with their natural need. One way to do this is to move breakable or untouchable things from their reach. Put things within reach that a small child can touch or mouth such as blocks, balls, or stuffed toys. They like playing with



kettles, wooden spoons, or other kitchen utensils that are not sharp or breakable. As children get older they will no longer need to mouth and handle everything.

Children need to have new experiences. If youngsters spill milk on the table, you can help them learn to handle the cup carefully. Mark a small glass with fingernail polish. Give them a small pitcher to pour their own milk up to that line. Three-year-olds can learn to carefully pour their own milk.

If you forbid, scold, and punish children for taking things apart or emptying cupboards or drawers, you are working against their natural curiosity. You work with your child by providing things that can be taken apart or a box or drawer they can empty and put things into. Pieces of pipe that screw together easily or puzzles help satisfy the need to take things apart and put back together. Be sure to provide things that are within the child's ability to put back together.

Another thing that is difficult for children is expecting them to travel any distance without getting restless or fighting with other children. Children need activity. Provide games or toys to keep them busy. When you take a long trip, put your luggage in the center of the back seat so children have their own side. Children cooped up in a small place for a long time together are bound to fight with one another.

Set Limits for Children

Everyone needs to know how far they can go. This is especially true for children. Limits allow children freedom to make decisions within given boundaries. To go no farther than the edge of the sidewalk or the back step is a set limit. Freedom and limits are different for each child. Some children need a high fence, others will stay within a low one. Most important is that children know there are limits. Set limits after you answer these questions:

Is this limit necessary for the child's safety?
Crossing the street, playing in dangerous places.

Is it necessary for the safety and well-being of others?
Harmful to other adults or children.

Is it necessary for the protection of property?
Destructive to furnishings or other people's things.

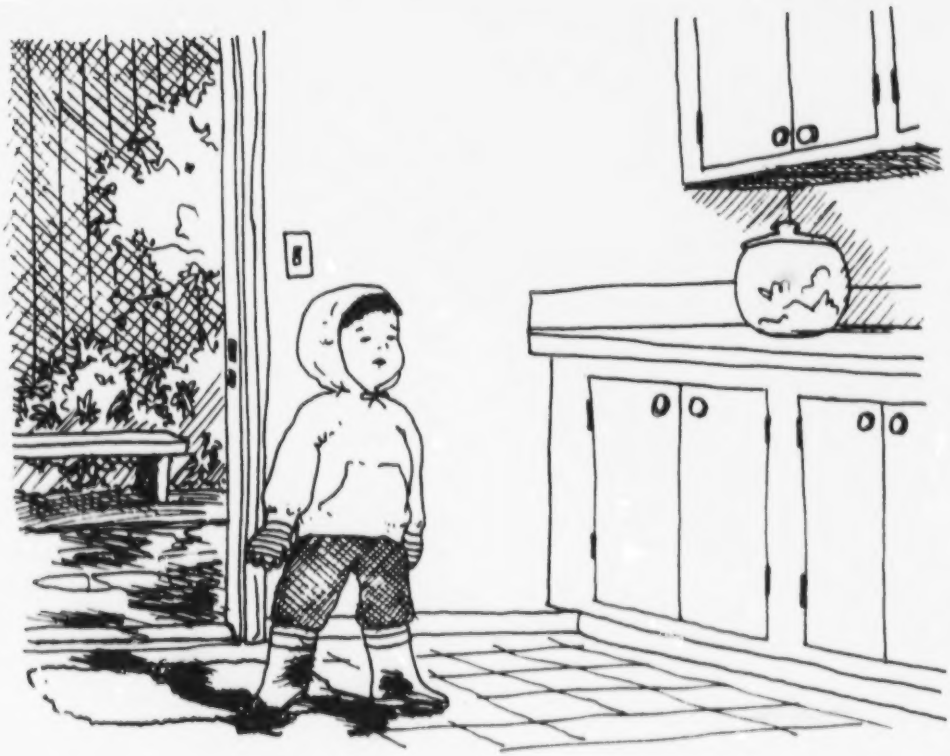
Is this limit necessary or has it been outgrown?
Young children have different limits than older ones.

Is this limit mostly for the comfort of adults?
Too many naps, no noise or mess.

Does this limit stop children from satisfying natural curiosity or activity needs?

Children and parents get along better when the limits are few and parents enforce them. Too many limits rob a child of the freedom to make decisions. For example, if there is a fenced yard, is there something to do inside the fence? If they cannot cross the street, how can they play with the children in another yard? If they cannot play in the toilet water, where can they play in water?

Sometimes parents set limits without thinking about the reason for the limits. They say, "This is the rule because I say so." Or other parents regularly say "no" to almost everything. Not all limits need to be explained to a child, but you should know the reason for it. Older children need to know the reason for a limit so they can begin to set their own limits. "We don't play in the street because we may be run over by a car" is a limit children learn very early. When you hear them tell other children to stay out of the street, you know they are beginning to understand the importance of limits.



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Listen to Yourself, Your Child

Parents who stop to listen to themselves can get ideas about their methods of child guidance. If you hear yourself say "If I've told you once, I've told you a dozen times...," stop and think how this makes a child feel. It took you a long time to learn all of the things you know. Be patient with children as they learn. They have a short memory and cannot remember rules very long. Also, they don't always understand what you are saying.

Young children are unable to follow many instructions given at the same time. Father should not be surprised if Judy does not follow all of his instructions when he tells her: "Take these toys to your room. Put your pajamas away and get your shoes and socks on. Then wash your face and brush your teeth—and hurry up!" Judy will probably wash her face and brush her teeth, thinking she has done what she was

told to do. Being told too much, too fast is upsetting to young children. They remember fewer things for a shorter time than adults. They are more likely to follow your instructions if they are short, simple, and given one step at a time.

When these guides are followed, children can succeed at many tasks. When they succeed and gain parents' approval, they feel good about themselves. Their pride in themselves helps them learn to do more things better.

Sometimes parents are surprised to discover what children are learning. Listen to your children with patience, interest, and understanding. Talking with your children about what they are doing and making plans with them adds to their use of words. Questions like "What happened then?" "What did you think about that?" "What should we do next?" develop ideas and communication.

Set a Good Example

Children learn from their parents by watching and listening to the important people near them. Then they do what they have seen. A parent who slaps or screams at children is teaching that this is the way to treat other people. A mother who sends John to the door to tell a salesman she isn't home is teaching John to lie. A father who disobeys speed laws and watches so the cop won't catch him is teaching dishonesty and lack of respect for the law. Parents want honest children who show respect for others. This means they must act and speak the way they want their child to do. It does not work if you just tell how to act. Children will copy you anyway.

Show Love

Parents show love for their children by doing things for them and with them. They make them eat food which is "good for them," go to bed early, or wear coats when it's rainy or cold. Children do not always see this as loving. They want to eat what they like, stay up late, and run outside without coats. Parents and caretakers want to help children do the best thing and they need to do it in ways that children can understand.

Perhaps the best way to express love is with a warm, friendly smile. Words also get across the message of love. Some words that show love are:

"You did a fine job."
"I'm glad you're my kid."
"You are such a kind boy."
"I love you."
"Mommy's proud of you."
"You are so beautiful."
"You learned that in a hurry."
"You remembered everything."

Sometimes it helps to listen to other parents talk to their children. Do they sound as if they love their child? You can ask yourself whether a stranger would think you loved your child if she heard the things you say and the words you use.

An important way to show children you love them is to frequently give them your full attention. Read them a story or play with them. When they have things they want to tell you, listen patiently and carefully. Ask questions about what they are telling you.

Look Ahead

As you make decisions on how to act with your children, think about how it will help their growth. Are you thinking about important things or are you making a big thing about simple mistakes? Spilling milk or food, wetting pants, or refusing a certain food is not a big behavior problem. Many things that parents are anxious about are not worth the fuss. But it is wise to take a stand on important things that will make them better people and keep them safe from harm. Helping children grow from infancy to adulthood is an exciting experience if you use common sense and remember what is best for them.

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Payoffs for Parents

"Are there any happy parents?" you may be wondering. "All of this advice sounds all right but it won't work with my child. It's not practical and I don't have the time or energy to guide my children that way."

It may be surprising but in the long run it saves time and energy. It's true some ideas do not work all of the time, but they work often enough to make it worthwhile. As a child's teacher, you want to learn a variety of ways to work with children as they are all different and situations are different. If you can add these methods to the ideas you already have, you will find it pays off in satisfaction for you and a happier child. Wise parents know that they are human and make mistakes. There will be times when you will yell at, say "don't," or spank a child.

Your patience will be tried many times within a day. Even if you are a superparent and use these methods most of the time, you will find that Judy or John do not always cooperate. Children are human too. Some days they are tired and weary or not feeling well. At those times, it is harder, if not impossible, to learn new things. Good parents try all of the time, gently helping their child with the best methods they know.

Children are preschoolers for a very short time in comparison to their total life. The experiences and satisfactions they receive during these years are the basis for future actions and learning. One of the best safeguards against trouble in later life is to develop togetherness, love, and respect in the years before school.

Self Tests

Practice is an important part of learning good child guidance methods. Parents and children learn what they practice. The following exercises will help you become a better parent if you practice them.

1. Turn these "don'ts" into "do's" by telling or showing.
   "Don't drag your sweater in the dirt."
   "Don't scream at me."
   "Don't talk with your mouth full."
   "Don't run in the store."
   "Don't talk back to me."

2. Change "put down" statements into encouraging, helpful statements to build feelings of worth.

   Carmen broke a glass when she was drying dishes: "Don't be so clumsy."
   Four-year-old Johnny wet his pants: "You're a bad boy."
   Bill bumped a tree when he was mowing the lawn: "Can't you ever do anything right?"

3. Providing choices.
   State a question for each of the following situation statements that would give your child a choice you would accept.

   You are going visiting and you want Carmen to wear one of two dresses: "What do you want to wear today?"

   You're ordering dinner in a restaurant and have a small amount of money to spend: "What do you want to order?"

   Johnny, age 2, is in the high chair waiting for his lunch: "What do you want for lunch?"

   Parents select situations from which children can make choices. It helps children learn responsibility for themselves. Parents select; children choose.

4. When there is no choice.
   In the following situations, the child is given a choice but there really isn't one. What could you say that would make a child's choice acceptable to a parent?

You are visiting a neighbor with your 4-year-old. You are getting ready to leave: "Do you want to go now?"

You plan that your daughter will dust the living room before guests arrive: "Would you like to dust the living room for me?"

Carmen is dancing around because she has to go to the toilet: "Do you want to go to the toilet?"

Parents have the responsibility to speak positively in matters in which a child has no choice about the action expected.

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5. Change these situations to change behavior.

   Five-year-old Johnny always tracks across the kitchen floor to a chair where he sits while taking off his muddy boots.

   Carmen and Maria are teenagers who share the same room. They fight all the time because Maria does not keep her things picked up.

   John and James keep poking at one another when they are at the dinner table.

   Two-year-old Carlos plays with things on the coffee table which are valuable and breakable.

   Parents make it more pleasant for themselves and children when situations that cause trouble are changed.

6. Working with children means providing things for them to do that are right for their age. What would you do? Rosa is 2 and climbs on all the furniture. You do not want her to do this.

   John is 15 and does not want to go on a day-long picnic outing with the family.

7. Limits that can be enforced help children learn self-control. Limits provide choices within given boundaries. What limits would you set for:

   TV viewing for all children in the family?

   The use of scissors by a 4-year-old?

   Driving the family car by a 17-year-old?

Do Positive Things

1. Keep a record for one day of the positive things you say to children when:
   - It is time for bed.
   - You want them to do a good job.
   - You want them to turn off TV.
   - You want them to change a behavior.
2. Keep a record of the number of times you say: "no," "don't," or "quit" during a day. Think of ways you could change your instructions to children.
3. You are interested in teaching behaviors you value such as responsibility, honesty, cooperation, and sharing. How do you practice what you preach?
4. How do you show family members you love them? Keep a list for a day. Have older children keep a list and compare it with yours at the end of a day.
5. When you have had a struggle with a family member, ask yourself what difference this incident is likely to make five years from now.

Additional Reading

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